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## House Unit Is Told That C.I.A. Spied on Mail to Red Countries

WASHINGTON, March 21 (UPI)—The Central Intelligence Agency, with full cooperation from the Postal Service, illegally opened some mail that was sent between the United States and Communist countries between 1953 and 1973, Congressional testimony disclosed today.

The mail surveillance operation was outlined to the House Civil Liberties Subcommittee in closed session last Tuesday by the chief postal inspector, William J. Cotter, and elaborated on today by Dr. Melvin Crain, a former C.I.A. agent who was involved in the operation.

"The letters were opened, reproduced, resealed and sent on their way without interrupting mail flow or their opening in anyway being detected," Dr. Crain said.

According to law, any Government agency wishing to open first-class mail must obtain a search and seizure order from a Federal court.

The subcommittee chairman, Robert W. Kastenmeier, Democrat of Wisconsin, said the program "to intercept, open, and duplicate the mail of American citizens [was] in direct violation of the letter and spirit of the law."

### Critical of Activity

"I find this program to be a reprehensible manifestation of the view that so-called 'national security' concerns outweigh the rights of citizens to privacy of their associations, papers and communications," Mr. Kastenmeier said.

In his Tuesday testimony, Mr. Cotter said the mail opening operation had taken place at Kennedy International Airport in New York and in San Francisco.

He expressed the belief that every President going back to Dwight D. Eisenhower was "aware of this activity conducted by the C.I.A." He also testified that during the Administration of Richard M. Nixon two top officials—Postmaster General Winton M. Blount and Attorney General John N. Mitchell—not only knew about the operation but also condoned it.

Dr. Crain said he was told at a C.I.A. briefing that the mail-opening activity was the result of a joint operation among the C.I.A., Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Post Office.

Dr. Crain, who said all covert intelligence activities by the United States should be stopped, detailed how he had "personally witnessed and handled" the letters that regularly came through his office.

"There were hundreds and hundreds of them," he said. "It must not continue. It must not recur. The 'mail must go through' all right—but unopened by spooks."

Mr. Cotter said he knew of the mail opening in his capacity as an assistant C.I.A. agent in the early nineteen-fifties. He said the C.I.A. activity was suspended in 1973 and to his knowledge, has not been continued since.

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